DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 364 468 SO 023 506

AUTHOR Metcalf, Fay
TITLE Roadside Attractions. Teaching with Historic Places.
INSTITUTION National Park Service (Dept. of Interior), Washington, D.C.; National Register of Historic Places, Washington, DC. Interagency Resources Div.; National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE [93]
NOTE 14p.; Photographs may not reproduce clearly. For related documents in this series, see SO 023 502-509.
AVAILABLE FROM National Trust for Historic Preservation, Teaching with Historic Places Project, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20036.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *Folk Culture; *History Instruction; Local History; *Popular Culture; Social Studies; *Tourism; *United States History
IDENTIFIERS *Roadside Attractions

ABSTRACT

This document, part of the lesson plan series, "Teaching with Historic Places," examines roadside attractions of the United States. Following introductory material the document sets out student objectives and teaching activities. Among the instructional suggestions are sections on "Setting the Stage"; "Locating the Sites"; "Determining the Facts"; and "Putting It All Together." The lesson plan includes nine photographs, eight of which are incoporated into a lesson on using visual evidence. There are readings and activities on the subjects of "Representational Architecture"; "Wigwam Village No. 2"; and "Boosterism and Giant Statues." The document recommends sources for further reading and details on the locations of the roadside attractions that the lesson discusses. (SG)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 364 468

Roadside Attractions

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

KATHLEEN
HOOTER

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

SO 023 506

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Teaching with Historic Places

A program of the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places and the National Trust for Historic Preservation

Roadside Attractions

BY FAY METCALF

Have you ever bought your milk while inside a milk bottle? Paid for your gas inside a teapot or a sea shell? Slept in a wigwam? Climbed on a dinosaur? Have you compared your foot size with that of Paul Bunyan? These and many more such activities attracted hometowners and tourists alike as millions of Americans took to the road when the automobile revolutionized American life. Some set off on ambitious cross-country trips; others on jaunts to neighboring states to visit newly opened national parks; and some simply crossed town for Sunday dinner or to pick up milk from the store.

In this lesson, the students will examine five examples of roadside architecture built in the 1920s and 1930s and designed to catch the eye of passing motorists—three represented literalism in advertising, one was intended as a political joke, and one was designed to lure the traveler into spending the night in an "exotic" setting. The students also will examine two structures that exemplify the concept of boosterism. Several new terms, such as *duck* and *place-product packaging*, will be defined in the readings provided.

This lesson about roadside attractions is based on National Register of Historic Places nomination files. Materials for students include (1) readings describing the origins of seven examples of this vernacular style and (2) photographs from the sites of these structures. This lesson could be used as an adjunct to textbook coverage of the rise of auto culture. Supplementary lessons could be developed on such topics as the diner, the fast-food industry, or the tourist courts that became roadside motels.

Objectives for the Students

- To explain the impact the automobile had on business as merchants and city leaders strove to gain financially from increased automobile traffic during the 1920s and 1930s.
- To list the changes that auto culture brought to the students' own community.
- To define and explain the motivation for literalism in advertising, place-product packaging, and boosterism, and to compare current examples with those of the 1920s and 1930s.
- To identify local structures that reflect "novelty" architecture.
- To explain ways in which advertising and packaging promote stereotypical and oversimplified images of different groups in American society.

Teaching Activities

Setting the Stage

Explain to the students that few inventions have had as great and as widespread an impact as the automobile. By 1920, over 300 cities had roadside camping facilities for motorists and more than one million people used them. Streets and highways were quickly built or modernized and a uniform numbering system for highways was introduced in 1925; by 1930 nearly 27 million cars were registered. The production, sale, repair, and servicing of cars provided work for millions. The Great Depression struck the tourist trade a great blow. Expenditures for hotels, restaurants, vacation clothing, and

travel supplies fell from $872 million in 1929 to $444 million in 1932. Clearly, the people who would stay in business during tough times would be those who could appeal to the smaller number of tourists on the road.

By the time prosperity returned, roadside advertising had become a normal operating cost for businesses. Travel by automobile again increased, and by 1950, 75 percent of the world's cars were in the United States. Because distances seemed diminished with the car, people could live farther from where they worked, and suburbs developed around all major cities. It became commonplace to drive 20 or 30 miles to the nearest big town to shop or to go to the increasingly popular movies. Small town merchants tried to lure back their customers in novel ways. Others sought out property alongside the new highways and competed for tourist dollars. All in all, the 1920s and—in spite of the Great Depression—the 1930s literally changed the American landscape.

Locating the Sites

Examples of boosterism and literalism in advertising exist in many states. Have the students examine the map of the United States and note how widespread the sites in this lesson are. As the lesson progresses, have students locate sites and define and label examples of follies, literalism in advertising, Art Deco, "ducks," place-product packaging, vernacular public art, and boosterism. Some structures may be placed in more than one category.

Determining the Facts

Reading 1: Representational Architecture

Have the students read "Representational Architecture," which excerpts material from four different National Register nomination files dealing with examples of what is called literalism in advertising or representational architecture. They then answer the following questions:

a. Why is the Teapot Dome Service Station regarded as a folly and as a political joke?

b. What more can you find out about the Teapot Dome scandal from a U.S. history book or an encyclopedia?

c. Why would a teapot-shaped gas station serve as an effective advertisement?

d. The Shell Service Station is considered an example of literalism in advertising. See if you can puzzle out what semiological means from the context of the full sentence. Does your definition agree with that found in a dictionary? (Use of signs for signaling)

e. Why might the owner of the Big Pump have wanted his gas station to look like his new electric pump?

f. Is the Big Pump a folly? An example of literalism in advertising? A "duck"?

g. Reread the first section on the Benewah Milk Bottle. Why might it also be called a "duck"?

h. Does it seem reasonable that the owner of the milk-bottle dairy shop really cared about the well-being of young people? Why or why not?

Reading 2: Wigwam Village

Have the students read "Wigwam Village No. 2" and answer the following questions:

a. In what ways did the owners of Wigwam Village No. 2 try to entice travelers to stop at their motel?

b. How is place-product-packaging different from literalism in advertising?

c. If you had been a traveler in the 1930s, would you have been attracted to the Wigwam Village? Would a stay there seem like part of your vacation? Why or why not? Why might those traveling through Kentucky have found American Indian images "exotic"?

d. What does Wigwam Village tell you about ethnic attitudes of the 1930s? Do you think it presents an accurate picture of American Indian life? How does it stereotype Indian culture?

e. Why might American Indians find Wigwam Village offensive? How might this nomination have differed if it had been written by an American Indian?

Reading 3: Boosterism and Giant Statues

After the students have completed Reading 3, they answer these questions:

a. Could boosterism be defined as a technique for stimulating tourism? Explain your answer.

b. Had you already heard of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox? If not, see if your library has more information.

c. Are your own measurements proportionately the same as Paul Bunyan's—that is, are you six times as tall as the length of your foot?

d. Look up vernacular in a dictionary and then define the term vernacular public art.

e. Reread the quotation from Marling. Can you think of anything else that could be described in that manner? (Halloween, horror movies)

Visual Evidence

Have the students look at photos 1, 2, and 3. Ask them to consider if, in some ways, all three gas stations are follies. In what ways are the stations alike? How are they different? Have the students closely examine the photo of the Teapot Dome Service Station. Ask them to look for clues that show that the building has been around for some time. (For example, what was the price of gasoline when the photo was taken? How does that compare with today's price?) What other changes have taken place at gas stations? (uniformed attendants, different style of gas pump) Now have the students examine Photo 4, which provides another example of the type of popular architecture that blossomed during the 1920s and 1930s. Why is the Benewah Milk Bottle more like the Shell Service Station and the Big Pump than like the Teapot Dome?

Next, have the students look at Photo 5 which shows an example of place-product packaging. Explain that the motel places items in the rooms that patrons could take home as souvenirs of their stay. These included ashtrays embossed with tepees and imitation bank checks from the motel. These items served as advertisements as well as souvenirs. The gift shop sold t-shirts and miniature plaster tepees that looked just like the sleeping rooms (motel guests could purchase one marked with the number of their unit). Also note that the owner erected tepee-shaped signs advertising Wigwam Village along Kentucky's highways. After this explanation, the term *place-product packaging* should be clearer.

Finally, have the students examine photos 6, 7, and 8. Discuss with them how they might have felt viewing these colossal statues as seven- or eight-year-olds. Children are allowed to climb some of the dinosaurs. Would this familiarity with the "horrible or uncanny" creatures make them less terrifying? Is knowledge of the "hoax" necessary to the viewing pleasure of such large statues?

Putting It All Together

It is hard for students, indeed for all of us, to imagine how our landscape appeared before the days of the automobile. A primary impact of widespread use of the auto was the development of roadside attractions. The following activities will encourage students to consider the importance of some of these attractions.

Activity 1: Designing a Building

This lesson has introduced a number of terms that may be new to the students. To see if they have grasped these terms, ask the students to sketch structures they might want to build that represent (1) literalism in advertising, (2) place-product-packaging, and (3) vernacular public art. They should be creative in their choice of design—no gas stations, motels or dinosaurs! Suggest that the students think of businesses or public art that would be particularly appropriate for their region. The students then share their completed, but unlabeled drawings to see if classmates can determine which term has been represented.

Activity 2: The Automobile and the Local Community

1. Have students investigate the ways in which the automobile changed their community. They are to look for clues that show what their town was like before the coming of the automobile by answering the following questions:

a. Do most students ride buses to school? Did their parents?

b. Do many people work and shop near where they live? Did their grandparents?

c. Are there old gas stations or automobile showrooms downtown? How are they now used?

d. How many parking lots or parking garages are there in a given neighborhood or business area? What kinds of businesses have been specifically designed for customers traveling by car?

e. Have any buildings in the area been torn down to build a highway?

f. What kinds of signs do they see along the streets and highways in their community? Have they been designed to be read by pedestrians or motorists?

2. Have the students explore whether any examples of the types of fanciful vernacular architecture or public art studied in this lesson exist or ever existed in their community. If they do find examples, they should find out if efforts are being made to preserve these artifacts of the past. The students might help with such preservation efforts as a class project.

Activity 3: Convenience or Aesthetics?

Fast-food restaurants, motel chains, supermarkets, discount stores, and department stores all use place-product packaging. Have students first list examples found in their city or neighborhood. Then have them list three or four reasons why this practice has been so effective for business owners and so useful to consumers. (They might, for example, mention McDonald's Golden Arches, the KFC or Sears logo, or signs for K-Mart and Wal-mart.) The students then consider if these examples and those from the 1930s enhance our visual landscape or clutter up the roadsides. Does convenience override aesthetics?

Activity 4: Form, Fantasy, and Design

Since the time of the Romans, many have claimed that the design of a building should declare its purpose; that is, you should be able to tell at first glance if a building is, for example, a school, a shoe-repair shop, an apartment house, or a bank. This concept is known as *form follows function*. The pop architecture of the structures in this lesson might better be described as *form follows fantasy*. In discussing such works, J. J. C. Andrews writes, "Anything is better than the boredom of formalistic architecture . . . I begin to see Big Duck [an actual building in Long Island whose design was controversial] as one building in a whole city of such buildings. . . . You go to the orange for breakfast, read inside a huge open book, wash your car at the whale, pick up milk at the milk bottle, go out to dinner at the fish, and catch a movie at the duck."

In the 1920s and 1930s, such structures were a relatively common form of vernacular architecture. Most were constructed by their owners or by a local builder without the benefit of an architect. Some architects, in fact, dismissed the idea that a hamburger stand should look like a giant hamburger or a root-beer stand like a root-beer barrel. The general public, however, was enchanted by such structures.

Have students split into groups of four or five; each group redesigns a city block to include at least 10 buildings that are "ducks." These should include structures typically found in any city: a bank, a post office, a library, a barber shop, a restaurant, and clothing, furniture, drug, and toy stores. When each group has finished, tape the completed blocks together on the chalkboard. The class then votes on whether they would like to live in the city as it now exists or in the fantasy city they have created.

Visiting the Sites

Teapot Dome Service Station: Old State Highway 12, southeast of Zillah, Washington (Yakima County).

Shell Service Station: Sprague Street at Peachtree Street (N.W.), Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Big Pump: Highway 71N, 1 mile north of Maryville, Missouri.

Benewah Milk Bottle: South 321 Cedar, Spokane, Washington.

Wigwam Village No. 2: Highway 31W, 1.6 miles northeast of Highway 70, Cave City, Kentucky. The buildings still operate as a motel.

Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox: 3rd St. and Bemidji Avenue, Bemidji, Minnesota.

Dinosaur Park: Skyline Drive, west of downtown Rapid City, South Dakota. The site is maintained as a city park.

Further Reading

Useful sources on the subject of roadside architecture are J. J. C. Andrews, *The Well-Built Elephant: A Tribute to American Eccentricity* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983); Karal Ann Marling, *The Colossus of Roads* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Chester H. Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1985); and Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977).

This is one in a series of lesson plans by the National Register of Historic Places and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The National Register is maintained by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, as a means of recognizing properties significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture. Each registration file contains a description of the property, an explanation of its historical importance, one or more photographs, one or more maps, and sometimes other documentation. The computerized National Register Information System (NRIS) can produce listings according to location, historical function, historical theme, and other categories. To obtain copies of registration documents or NRIS information, contact Teaching with Historic Places, National Register of Historic Places, Interagency Resources Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, D.C. 20013-7127, or phone (202) 343-9536. The National Trust and its 250,000 members support preservation organizations and programs in neighborhoods and communities throughout the United States where staff and volunteers are available to work with their schools. For more information on the National Trust's educational programs, please write Heritage Education, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, or phone (202) 673-4040.

Teaching with Historic Places is made possible, in part, with special funding by the Cultural Resources Training Initiative and Parks as Classrooms programs of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended; and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 as amended, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, handicap, or age in its programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility, or if you desire further information, please write: Office of Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, D.C. 20013-7127.

Please write and tell us how you have used *Teaching with Historic Places* in your classroom, and the National Trust will send you a six-month complimentary membership.

Reading 1: Representational Architecture

Teapot Dome Service Station

Located on Old State Highway 12 in Zillah, Washington, the Teapot Dome Service Station was built in 1922. A circular frame building with conical roof, sheet-metal "handle," and concrete "spout," it is a landmark example of the roadside architectural follies built during the expansion of the national highway system in the 1920s and 1930s. The gas station is a humorous reminder of the Teapot Dome scandals that rocked the Harding administration.

Fanciful architecture was a colorful feature of highway culture and commerce during the period. Highly visible and usually humorous, these buildings caught the eye of the passing motorist and served as effective advertisements. The Teapot Dome station is a familiar sight to travelers in eastern Washington and ranks among the most notable follies in the state. Unlike others, however, the Teapot Dome station conveys a political joke, selling oil products from a structure whose shape recalls the controversy that sent U.S. Secretary of the Interior Albert Fall to prison for leasing government oil reserves to private producers.

Shell Service Station

The Shell Service Station was built in 1930 in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The Shell Company had not marketed its products in North Carolina before the late 1920s. Therefore the owners of the Quality Oil Company of Winston-Salem decided to attract customers with a series of shell-shaped service stations. Although at least eight of these stations were built in the area, the one-story-high structure at Peachtree and Sprague streets is the only one known to remain. It now houses a shop that repairs lawnmowers and small engines.

The Shell station is an excellent example of literalism in advertising in the 1920s and 1930s. The design's semiological content is explicit: the building's form visually repeats the Shell gasoline brand and is a three-dimensional representation of the Shell trademark. The station falls into the architectural category that the architect Robert Venturi has defined as "ducks." That is, the building is literally a sign, an advertisement that is read and immediately comprehended. The structure is such a rare and unusual survival of early 20th-century advertising techniques that it merits recognition and preservation.

Big Pump

Kyle Phares owned a gas station in Maryville, Missouri, and a vacant lot across the street at 903 Main Street. In 1937 Phares installed his first electric gasoline pump to replace the old gravity flow pumps. He later asked Charles Foster, a local builder, to erect a new station on the triangular-shaped vacant lot to look like the new electric pump. Foster used the pump's proportions to build an Art Deco structure resembling the new arrival. A slight curved indentation at 10 feet marks the point from which the structure continues upward another 10 feet. All four facades are curved at the top. A light on the east facade recalls the gas bulb of the electric gas pump.

At the grand opening, Phares gave away a quart of ice cream with each 10 gallons of gas purchased. The day was so successful that the station remained open until midnight to serve all the customers. The station carried the name Liberty and later was associated with Skelly and Texaco. After a period of independent operation, it was leased by CO-OP which operated it until the gasoline crisis of 1978. Big Pump is the name most commonly used for this structure.

The Big Pump is a significant and rare example of Depression-era gas station architecture and an exceptional Missouri artifact of commercial archeology.

Reading 1: Representational Architecture (continued)

Benewah Milk Bottle

A favorite and familiar landmark in Spokane, Washington, the Benewah Milk Bottle is a significant example of the concept of literalism in advertising. Completed in 1935, the bottle is stuccoed from its base to that section which tapers to the neck. The neck itself and cap are covered with sheet metal over a wooden frame. The entire structure originally was painted white. The property is one of a dozen examples in Washington State of novelty architecture, which integrated function with advertisement.

Owner Paul E. Newport built two such milk bottles as retail outlets for his thriving Benewah Dairy Company. His advertising stated that the bottles were "designed to build better men and women by making dairy products attractive to boys and girls. No expense will be spared to make these new stores as sturdy, as fine, and as good as the products they represent." To mark the opening of the new milk bottle stores, Newport sponsored a soap box derby on Post Hill, an event that was enjoyed by thousands of young people.

Reading 1 was compiled from the following National Register nomination forms: "Teapot Dome Service Station" (Yakima County, Washington), by Richard L. Thomas, owner, and Leonard Garfield, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, 1985; "Shell Service Station" (Forsyth County, North Carolina), by Brent Glass and Mary Alice Hinson, 1975; "Big Pump" (Nodaway County, Missouri), by Thomas W. Carneal, 1979; and "Benewah Milk Bottle" (Spokane County, Washington), by Nancy Compau, historian, and Scott Brooks-Miller, Historic Preservation Office, 1986.

Reading 2: Wigwam Village No. 2

The coming of the automobile broadened the concepts of recreation and leisure. Unlike travel by train—for decades the most common means of long-distance transportation used by Americans—motoring could be, itself, part of a vacation, not just the means of reaching a destination. In the early 1920s, "autocamping" became the rage and campgrounds sprang up all over the country. By the end of the decade, however, the camps' latrines and common showers, and the increasing patronage by itinerants brought about by the onset of the Depression, made these facilities less desirable for many motorists. The next step was the cabin or cottage camp, or the proto-motel. The tiny individual tourist cabins usually emphasized the attractions of the region; for example, mock colonial houses in New England, adobe huts in the Southwest, and the wigwam in Kentucky.

Featuring 18 steel-and-concrete tepees, the 1937 motor court called Wigwam Village No. 2 occupies a site in the northern outskirts of Cave City, Kentucky, near Mammoth Cave. The exteriors of the 18 "wigwams" vary only in size and number of windows. At 52 feet tall and approximately 35 feet in diameter, the gift shop and office—originally a lunch room and office—is the largest. Each of the 15 sleeping-room wigwams is approximately 25 feet in diameter and has two windows. The exterior walls are painted white accented with a bright red jagged lower edge at the top of the cone, a bold zig-zag band encircling the building halfway up the wall, and a narrow zig-zag band with small triangles along the inner edge of the window openings and marks similar to exclamation points at the corners. In the narrow bathrooms created by a partition at the rear of the sleeping units, the floor is covered with red-and-white tiles and the walls and stall shower repeat the zig-zag motif.

The sleeping-room numbers above the doors and on the sides next to the respective parking spaces are also red. Four slender metal poles project from the top of each wigwam in imitation of branches of wood. Two Art Deco-inspired tubular metal-and-plywood chairs sit at the edge of the lawn opposite the door to each sleeping unit.

Wigwam Village No. 2 is significant as the hallmark of a type of hostelry that developed in direct response to the proliferation of the automobile in the 1930s. In its fanciful emulation of an Indian encampment, Wigwam Village No. 2 also exemplifies a unique type of architecture created for automobile travelers along the American roadside. The cultural message evoked by its architectural form—the wigwam—was key to the motel's profits. Wigwam Village No. 2 is one of the most historic forerunners of a practice now known as place-product-packaging—the commercial use of architectural imagery by service-oriented establishments along the American roadside.

There once were seven wigwam villages. The first was located in nearby Horse Cave, Kentucky. Others were in Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, and Louisiana. Of these, only Wigwam Village No. 2 has been carefully preserved and continuously operated as a motel.

Reading 2 was compiled from the National Register nomination form "Wigwam Village No. 2" (Barren County MRA, Kentucky), by Claudia R. Brown, National Register Coordinator, Kentucky Heritage Council, and Keith A. Sculle, National Register Coordinator, Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, 1988.

Reading 3: Boosterism and Giant Statues

Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox

Minnesota's first and best-known example of the "roadside colossus," the statuary grouping of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox, is historically significant for its role in promoting tourism in the northern part of the state.

Located in a vast woodland and lake region, the city of Bemidji played host to a modest tourist trade as early as the 1890s. After the establishment of rail connections in 1898, promoters began developing lakeshore sites for summer cottages and constructing a variety of tourist hotels and resorts, primarily catering to hunters and anglers. Benefiting from the emergence of automobile travel and a state highway system, the Bemidji tourist industry experienced a boom during the 1920s, but suffered with the rest of the economy during the Great Depression.

In 1936, as a means of stimulating, or "boosting," tourism, a number of civic organizations and businesses decided to sponsor a winter carnival that would promote the city's resources for winter sports. The carnival opened on January 14, 1937. Taking its theme from Bemidji's former prominence as a lumbering center, the celebration focused on the mythical figure of Paul Bunyan, a giant lumberjack of redoubtable endurance and skill who had traveled with the folklore of the lumber camps from New England to Minnesota during the mid-19th century.

The carnival unveiled giant statues of Paul and his blue ox, Babe, to serve as mascots for the festivities. Both statues were designed and built by city residents. They became overnight sensations, garnering a full-page spread in *Life* magazine. Both were placed in a municipal park overlooking the lake and the city's busiest intersection. Although oversized statues have now become fairly common devices for promoting tourism, Bemidji's Paul and Babe were pioneer efforts in the field.

Paul Bunyan is approximately 18 feet high, measuring about five feet across at the base and about three feet from toe to heel. Babe stands about 10 feet tall, measuring about eight feet across the front hoofs and about 23 feet from nose to tail.

Dinosaur Park

Dinosaur Park is one of the most elaborate examples of roadside tourist sculpture in the state of South Dakota and an excellent example of vernacular public art. Mount Rushmore, about 20 miles southwest of Rapid City, became the site of the great carvings of four American presidents who played a major role in westward expansion. That sculpture was first dedicated in 1930, and by 1935, some 200,000 visitors had visited the unfinished monument. These statistics were not lost on the promoters of Rapid City. Tourism was big business and the chamber of commerce was eager to make the connection between one successful sculpture and another.

The idea of dinosaurs as the subject of a new sculpture came from Dr. C. C. O'Hara, the retired president of the South Dakota School of Mines and a paleontologist who was fascinated by the prehistoric dinosaur remains he had found in the Badlands of South Dakota. Others also liked the idea. The creation of concrete dinosaurs hit three nerves in the American aesthetic—a sense of the history of the West, an enjoyment of things larger than life, and a secret pleasure in being frightened. Dinosaur Park was dedicated on May 22, 1936.

All five of the original dinosaurs were built in identical fashion. The frames are composed of two-inch-diameter black iron pipe set in concrete. Around the central frame, body forms consist of a steel skeleton covered with wire mesh to which the concrete skin is applied. Oral tradition has it that the park's dinosaurs originally were gray, but today they are painted vivid green, with touches of pinkish red. Built to authentic size, the five dinosaurs measure the following:

1. Triceratops—27 feet long, 11 feet high, with 40-inch horns
2. Tyrannosaurus Rex—35 feet long, 16 feet high, with a 4-feet-long head and 6-inch-long teeth
3. Brontosaurus—80 feet long and 28 feet high
4. Stegosaurus— 11 feet long and 7 feet high
5. Trachodon—33 feet long and 17 feet 6 inches high.

Reading 3: Boosterism and Giant Statues (continued)

Art historian Karal Ann Marling explains in *The Colossus of Roads* the appeal of the awesomely large prehistoric animals in this way: "Humor and fakery create situations that appear 'dangerous, horrible or uncanny' and then disperse the sensation of terror with the sudden realization that the whole thing was a hoax."

Reading 3 was compiled from the National Register nomination forms "Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox" (Beltrami County, Minnesota), by Jeffrey A. Hess, 1987, and "Dinosaur Park" (Pennington County, South Dakota), by Carolyn Torma, Historical Survey Coordinator, State Historical Preservation Center, 1990.

1. Teapot Dome Service Station, Zillah, Washington.
(Leonard Garfield, 1985; Washington State Office of Archeology
and Historic Preservation)

2. Shell Service Station, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.
(Jo-Ann Sisburg, 1975; State Department of Archives
and History, Raleigh).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

3. Big Pump, Maryville, Missouri.
(photographer unknown, 1937; Northwest Missouri State University)

4. Benewah Milk Bottle, Spokane, Washington.
(Scott Brooks-Miller, 1986; Historic Preservation Office, Spokane)

5. Units 8–15, Wigwam Village No. 2, Cave City, Kentucky.
(Claudia R. Brown, 1988; Kentucky Heritage Council).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

6. Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox, Bemidji, Minnesota. (Jeffrey Hess, 1986; Audio Visual Department, Minnesota Historical Society)

7. Dinosaur Park, Rapid City, South Dakota. (John Rau, 1987; South Dakota Historical Preservation Center)

8. Tyrannosaurus Rex, Dinosaur Park, Rapid City, South Dakota. (John Rau, 1987; South Dakota Historical Preservation Center)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE